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ABSTRACT

A model of identity formation, based on the cognitive developmental stages of social perspective-taking, was tested to determine if identity is achievable through cognitive strategies of considering the self in relation to friends, family, peers, and society. Two separate studies, one involving college students (N=28) and one involving high school seniors (N=48), were conducted. Subjects were divided into experimental and control groups which met for one hour three days a week, for two weeks. Both groups completed Rasmussen's Ego Identity Scale as the pre- and post-test dependent measure. The experimental group went through a series of questions which operationalized the Enright and Deist model of identity formation, while the control group solved logical problems. In the college sample, experimentals gained more than the controls on the identity subscale, but not on the Rasmussen composite. The high school sample changed on the composite, but the identity subscale did not show any significant treatment effects. Both studies suggest that social perspective taking as an organized cognitive strategy can lead to greater integrated self-identity. (Author/NRB)

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Promoting Ego Identity Development in Adolescence and Youth

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Promoting Ego Identity Development in Adolescence and Youth

Abstract

A model of identity formation based on the cognitive developmental stages of social perspective taking is described. The model assumes that identity can be achieved through cognitive strategies of considering the self in relation to one friend, one's family, the peer group, and society. Two studies were undertaken to test the model. In study 1 a program with 28 college students, half experimentals and half controls, lasting for six sessions was used in which the students were asked to take the perspective of each social entity above and then to consider how the self was like and unlike these. Repeated measures analyses of variance showed that the experimentals gained significantly more on Rasmussen's Ego Identity Scale following the program. In study 2, 43 high school seniors were given the same program. The experimentals gained more in the identity measure than the controls. Implications for identity programs are discussed.

Promoting Ego Identity Development

in Adolescence and Youth

Adolescent ego identity has received a great deal of attention from neo-Freudian psychologists. Erikson (1968), the primary spokesman for the construct, implies that identity development consists of three subconstructs: a self, an ego, and formal operational abilities. The self is the content of one's thoughts as the person reflects on one's own body image, personality, or behavioral roles. As Erikson (1968, p. 208) states, when an individual possesses an identity, the self includes "a conscious sense of individual uniqueness" and a sense of "solidarity with a group's ideals". Gallatin (1975) explains it as the person's awareness of how he or she is like all other people, like some other people, and like no other people. Most ego identity researchers have focused on the self component of identity (Baker, 1971; Marcia, 1966; Stark & Traxler, 1974).

The content of the self is the direct result of two processes (Erikson, 1968). One of these is the ego which screens and synthesizes incoming information. The other is formal operational abilities (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) which account for the environmental search for material to be cognitively synthesized (see Erikson, 1968, p. 245). More specifically, Erikson suggests the formal operational structure of awareness of all possibilities as the important component of identity formation. This is the case because, if the adolescent is to have a clear understanding of self, he or she must consider all the ways in which the self is both unique and shares commonalities with other societal members.

Enright and Deist (1979) have recently expanded this theoretical notion of identity formation. Rather than theorizing that the logical structure of considering all possibilities is the important cognitive component, they have built an identity formation model based on social perspective taking (Kohlberg, 1976;

Selman, 1976). The latter is a more specific set of the general cognitive developmental structures which Erikson (1968) and Inhelder and Piaget (1958) discuss. In general, social perspective taking represents the person' cognitive abilities to understand the world from other people's viewpoints. Both Kohlberg (1976) and Selman (1976), in inferring these underlying structures from clinical interviews, describe the developmental progression as follows:

Level 1: In Kohlberg's and Selman's models, the young child can understand one other person's viewpoint besides the self's. This is done sequentially rather than simultaneously (e.g., self's perspective or the other's at any one time).

Level 2: In both models, the child can take a reciprocal perspective, the self's and the other's, at the same time. Selman's model includes the ability to reflect upon the self from the other's viewpoint. Thus, the person can see how the self's reactions are similar to or different from the other's reactions.

Level 3: In both models, the child can take a "third party" perspective, or understand the social world from the group's viewpoint. Again, the Selman model suggests that the person can reflect on the self from this viewpoint, thus seeing similarities and differences between the group and the self.

Level 4: In both models, the adolescent coordinates group perspectives to form a societal perspective. The perspective allows the individual to understand society, and in Selman's model, allows the adolescent to see similarities and differences between the self and society.

Both Kohlberg and Selman assume these progressions to be integrative and hierarchical. That is, as the person progresses, he or she retains earlier

developments while developing more complex structures. Therefore, an adolescent, presumably on stage 4, should be capable of understanding one other person, various groups such as family and peer group, and society, as well as how the self is similar to or different from these social entities. The Enright and Deist (1979) model suggests these structures, rather than general formal operational structures, as the structures sufficient for identity formation since the latter is primarily a social construct (see Gallatin's definition) and perspective taking outlines the social possibilities which can be considered by the adolescent.

The Enright and Deist model does not study the stage progression of social perspective taking, nor does it assume that the highest stage of social perspective taking is, by itself, sufficient for a clear, organized ego identity. Instead, in focussing on the integration and hierarchization components of the Kohlberg and Selman models, it assumes that social perspective taking, on the highest level (in adolescence), can be used as a cognitive strategy. That is, the adolescent can, at any time, use the structural abilities to understand one other person, a group, or a society, and the similarities or differences between the self and these. The Enright and Deist model of identity formation makes the following assumptions: a) identity formation starts with an understanding of others; b) only when the person understands those others is he or she capable of understanding the self in relation to those others; c) the understanding of self in relation to others must take into account perceived similarities and differences. An exclusive focus on the former would lead to rigid conformity, not identity, while an exclusive focus on differences would lead to adolescent egocentrism where the person distorts the self, thinking he or she is totally special and unique (Elkind, 1967); d) identity forms when social perspectives are taken so that the individual minimizes confusion. This implies that it is best to start with the

more simple level 1 perspectives and work up to level 4 only after a clear understanding has emerged of a significant other and how one is like or unlike that person; and e) if the person uses social perspective taking as a cognitive strategy outlined above, then he or she should get a clearer sense of individual uniqueness as well as a sense of commonalities shared with others. As both Erikson (1968) and Gallatin (1975) state, this is the essence of adolescent ego identity. The two studies reported here were undertaken to test the above model of ego identity formation.

Study 1

This first study examined whether an intervention as outlined in the Enright and Deist model with college students would show growth in ego identity.

Method

Subjects. Twenty-eight college students, predominantly sophomores and juniors, from a large Midwestern university volunteered for the program. Based on the pretest identity score, the sample was split at the median and seven high and seven low identity students were randomly selected for the experimental condition. The other 14 served as controls. The sample was split at the median since the identity formation process may work only with low identity students. After all, if someone has a clear identity, such a program may help to confirm that clarity without showing growth on an ego identity scale. There were four males and 10 females in the experimental group and two males and 12 females in the control group.

Instrument. Rasmussen's (1964) Ego Identity Scale (EIS) was selected as the pretest and posttest dependent measure. It is a 72-item, forced-choice instrument in which the person checks "agree" or "disagree" to each statement. The statements were all chosen to represent, as closely as possible, Erikson's theoretical formulations of identity. According to Erikson, the identity crisis includes a

recapitulation of earlier psychosocial crises (trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, and industry vs. inferiority). It is also an anticipation of future psychosocial crises (intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair). The Rasmussen scale operationalizes conflicts at each stage from trust vs. mistrust through intimacy vs. isolation with 12 items per subscale. For examples, a negatively keyed industry vs. inferiority item is:

When it comes to working, I never do anything I can get out of.

To avoid response sets, Rasmussen keyed the items to make the "agree" alternative correct on some items and the "disagree" alternative correct on others. The total score is the added composite of each item, which is interpreted as the degree of psychological health exhibited in this complex identity crisis.

The split half reliability via the Spearman-Brown formula as reported by Rasmussen (1964) is .85. The scale has shown good validity properties. It has been related to educational level, intelligence, and self acceptance as well as to behavioral adjustment in Naval recruits (Rasmussen, 1964). It has also been negatively related to anxiety and positively related to Constantinople's identity measure (Bach & Verdile, 1975) and to Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (Rothman, 1978). The EIS was chosen in this study over the more popular Marcia scale because the summary score represents a more broad composite of identity rather than just careers and an ideological commitment as found in Marcia's.

Procedure. Both groups met for one hour a day, three days a week for two weeks. Both groups were given the Rasmussen scale on days 1 and 6. On the other four days both groups met together in the same room and went through a paper-and-pencil intervention on an individual basis. A paper-and-pencil intervention was chosen to standardize the experimental and control procedures as precisely as possible. It also allowed both groups to be treated the same by the

experimenter, a graduate student in school psychology trained in group therapy techniques, whose job consisted of clarifying any individual's questions that may arise during the six days. In fact, the post-experimental briefing revealed that two-thirds of the subjects were not even aware of another treatment condition being taken by others, thus reducing the lack of motivation characteristic of some control groups.

The experimental group was asked to go through a series of questions which operationalized the Enright and Deist (1979) model of identity formation. On day 2 (the first day of intervention), they were asked to think about one same-sex friend and how the self is like and unlike that person (level 2 perspective taking abilities). On day 3, they considered their family (level 3), on day 4 they considered an opposite sex peer group (level 3). A same-sex group was not used here because, on pilot testing, it was seen that there was too much repetition between the same-sex friend and group. On day 5, they considered society (level 4). A summary of the day 2 intervention with the same-sex friend is as follows:

1. In three sentences describe someone around your age and your same sex who you like pretty well.
2. From what you have observed . . .
   what does your friend talk about most?
   what does your friend spend his or her time on?
   (Other probes are also asked.)
3. From what you can infer . . .
   wnat does your friend think about a lot?
   what kinds of emotions occupy him or her most of the time -- or, in other words, what is his or her approach to the world -- or his or her "style"?
   (Other probes are included.)

4. Summarize your friend in three sentences.

5. In three sentences describe yourself as compared to your friend.

6. a. If there were someone else looking at and comparing you with your friend how would they see you as <u>similar</u> to your friend . . .

in what you talk about;

in what you spend your time doing?

(Others are included.)

b. If there were someone else looking at and comparing you with your friend how would they see you as <u>different</u> from your friend . . .

(the same probes as 6a were used).

7. a. From what you know about yourself and can infer about this person you like, how are you <u>similar</u> to your friend . . .

in the things you think about;

in the emotions that occupy you?

b. From what you know about yourself and can infer about this person you like, how are you <u>different</u> from your friends . . .

(the same probes as 7a were used).

8. Summarize yourself as compared with your friend.

The purpose of the questions was to first develop an understanding of the other and then, from that vantage point, to consider the self's similarities and differences. Understanding the other and the self involved the consideration of behaviors (e.g., #2, 6), thoughts and feelings (e.g., #3, 7). A similar procedure was followed for the family, peer group, and society. On day 5, following the societal understanding, the students were asked the following:

Summarize yourself from all of the comparisons with your friend, family, opposite sex group and society. Indicate what you have in common with them, the points in which you are unique, and what you are and what you

hope to be.

The control group was asked to solve two logical problems each day. For example, one problem asked them to consider all the possible sets that can be made with the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. This procedure should lead to enhanced ego identity if the formal operational structure of considering all possibilities is the critical component of identity formation as Erikson (1968) states.

Results and Discussion

Internal consistency reliability in this study via the Kuder-Richardson 20 formula for the pretest Rasmussen scores was .86. To test for treatment effects, group differences were analyzed for both the Rasmussen total score and the identity subscale since the latter is directly related to the program. None of the other subscales was analyzed separately since they were only tangentially related to the program (e.g., the trust subscale would not seem to be directly influenced by an identity program), and since more analyses may require an alpha level lower than .05.

Treatment effects were analyzed by three-way (pretest/posttest x treatment x initial high or low identity position) repeated measures ANOVA. The pretest and posttest scores were the repeated measure. For the Rasmussen total score, the interaction of pretest/posttest and treatment effect approached but did not reach significance, $F(1,24)=3.30$, $p < .08$. The mean change from pretest to posttest for the experimentals was 4.79 (S.D.=6.66), and for the controls was 0.50 (S.D.=6.00). Pretest and posttest descriptive statistics are in Table 1. The identity subscale showed a significant treatment x pretest/posttest interaction favoring the experimentals, $F(1,24)=8.86$, $p < .007$. The mean change, based on 12 items, for the experimental group was 1.57 (S.D.=1.28), and for the control group was -0.28 (S.D.=1.90). This first study, them, showed that the experimental group gained

more than the controls on the identity subscale, but not on the Rasmussen composite.

Study 2

Since the first study showed encouraging results, it was thought necessary to replicate the findings. This study used high school students in order to increase generality of the findings.

Method

Subjects. Forty-three high school seniors served as subjects. There were 22 experimentals and 21 controls chosen through a similar randomization process as Study 1. In the experimental group, there were seven males and 15 females. In the control group, there were 10 males and 11 females.

Instrument and Procedure. The Rasmussen measure was again used. The same procedure used in Study 1 was used here.

Results and Discussion

The three-way ANOVA for the Rasmussen total score produced a significant pretest/posttest x treatment interaction favoring the experimentals, $F(1,39)= 4.44$, $p < .05$. The mean change from pretest to posttest for the experimentals was 6.32 (S.D.=6.27) and for the controls was 2.62 (S.D.=5.27). Pretest and posttest descriptive statistics are in Table 2. The identity subscale did not show any significant treatment effects. This study shows that identity development can change in high school students who use perspective taking strategies.

General Discussion

Both the college and high school studies suggest that social perspective taking as an organizing cognitive strategy can lead to a more integrated identity in youth. According to Rasmussen's (1964) and Erikson's (1968) interpretations of identity, the experimentals showed greater gains in psychological health than

the controls in working through the crises of adolescence and youth.

There are several implications for theory from these studies. First, identity formation is not necessarily an affective process or a maturationist process dependent on an epigenetic principle only. The use of organized, step-by-step cognitive strategies may help reduce confusion and enhance identity even within as short a time span as two weeks. This is not to imply that identity is complete after two weeks of cognitive strategies, but the studies do imply that one's identity can become more integrated during that time through the use of strategies such as social perspective taking.

From the cognitive developmental viewpoint, the studies raise implications for the importance of integration (higher stages incorporate lower stage structures) and hierarchization (higher stages are more complex than lower stages). These aspects of stage structure, while they have been acknowledged, have been virtually ignored in studying adolescent cognition. Describing the highest stages only has been the goal rather than describing what the adolescent can do with cumulative abilities. Kohlberg (1976) focuses on the highest stages only in describing moral and social perspective taking developments; Selman (1976) does the same in perspective-taking; Tapp and Kohlberg (1971) do this in legal development; and Adelson and O'Neil (1966) do this in political development. The focus on integration and hierarchization shows us that in adolescence the person can consider at least 12 pieces of information at the same time: one friend, the family, a peer group, and society, as well as how the self is similar to all and different from all. A focus on stage 4 only shows us the adolescent's ability to understand society and the self in relation to society, or only two pieces of information.

Again from the cognitive developmental camp, these studies show the importance of studying the kinds of strategies in which the adolescent can engage rather than

focusing exclusively on cognitive structures (e.g., the INRC structural group) which is the prevailing model in cognitive development. These studies did not advance a new cognitive structure in adolescence. Instead, they demonstrated the way in which adolescents can use those structures in obtaining useful information for the self. Since identity is such a central development during adolescence, we would not expect the model presented here to be the only way of promoting that growth. Other kinds of cognitive strategies besides using the integrative and hierarchical aspects of social perspective taking may prove worthwhile. It does seem, however, that cognitive strategies in general are important aspects of identity formation.

From the viewpoint of applied psychology, the studies present a framework for promoting ego identity development in adolescents. The procedures are straightforward and rather simple to follow. Cautions are necessary, however, for applied work. First, the results were different for the college and high school studies. Although both showed significance, the college sample changed on the identity subscale while the high school sample changed on the composite. The different patterns suggest different influences on the samples or an unstable program that sometimes works and sometimes does not. More research is needed here. Second, the programs described here are somewhat "artificial" when compared to actual counseling or therapy sessions. The artificiality (e.g., the paper-and-pencil intervention) was necessary for the initial studies to increase scientific precision as much as possible. Standardization was necessary to eliminate competing hypotheses. For those interested primarily in practice rather than testing a scientific model, we suggest far more flexibility in the procedures. For instance, more time spent by the person on the intervention questions, small group interaction, or one-on-one discussions between helper and helpee may prove worthwhile. After all, the results found here were relatively small. It

would seem that the artificial nature of the procedure would have actually held scores down since there were time constraints and no interaction between students.

Another caution involves students' personal reactions to the program. We had three students in the high school group who seemed to be threatened by the program (e.g., consistency not showing up for sessions). Two of these, when taking the posttest, showed a drop in their EIS scores, possibly due to lack of motivation. The instructor should be ready to discuss any threat that may be felt as a result of the very personal program and students should feel free to drop out of the program at any time.

For the future, different aspects of the program might be tried as interventions in themselves. For instance, thinking about a friend and family only may be sufficient for promoting growth. This kind of procedure could show the more influential thought strategies, thus eliminating extraneous materials. Also, the model of identity formation might be tried with adolescent samples that may be having problems with identity formation. Delinquents or drug abusers may benefit from such a program. Making the procedures less artificial, lengthening time, and encouraging interaction may all prove worthwhile for those in need of a stronger sense of identity.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Measures of Study 1

	Experimental				Control			
	Pre $\bar{X}$	S.D.	Post $\bar{X}$	S.D.	Pre $\bar{X}$	S.D.	Post $\bar{X}$	S.D.
Rasmussen								
Total	51.14	10.02	55.93	8.62	53.21	8.53	53.71	10.75
Identity								
Subscale	8.36	1.91	9.93	1.90	9.21	2.52	8.93	2.92

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Measures of Study 2

	Experimental				Control			
	Pre $\bar{X}$	S.D.	Post $\bar{X}$	S.D.	Pre $\bar{X}$	S.D.	Post $\bar{X}$	S.D.
Rasmussen								
Total	50.04	9.20	56.36	9.56	49.38	9.75	52.00	10.23
Identity								
Subscale	7.54	2.15	9.00	2.67	7.95	2.60	8.57	2.86